

City of Los Altos

Vehicle Miles Traveled Policy



City Council Study Session
5/12/20

Agenda

- I. Background
- II. Pertinent Plans and Policies
- III. VMT Policy Framework
- IV. Level of Service Policy
- V. VMT Policy Timeframe

Background: LOS and VMT

Vehicular **Level of Service (LOS)** – a way of measuring transportation performance of a specific location that focuses on delay and congestion; letter scale from A to F

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) – measures amount of vehicular travel across the system, usually expressed per person

Background: LOS and VMT

For the past few decades, transportation analysis of projects has focused on **Level of Service (LOS)**

Senate Bill 743 is shifting the emphasis to **Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)**

Background: Senate Bill 743

- Became state law in September 2013
- Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) established new California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) criteria for transportation impacts (December 2018)
- "Automobile delay... shall not be considered a significant impact on the environment"
- New metric for evaluating impacts is daily VMT.
- Statewide mandatory adoption date: **July 1, 2020**

Background: Senate Bill 743

- Aligns with climate goals
- Intended to promote:
 - Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
 - Multimodal transportation networks
 - Diversity of land uses
- Does not preclude local agencies from applying LOS in policies, codes, conditions of approval, etc.

Background: Transportation Impact Analysis

Good grade in LOS \neq Success in Transportation

45 min commute
(5 min from congestion)



Good LOS Grade
Bad Accessibility

20 min commute
(10 min from congestion)



Bad LOS Grade
Good Accessibility

Which is better?

Background: Transportation Impact Analysis

Good grade in LOS \neq Success in Transportation



LOS A

(Courtesy of Governor's Office of Planning and Research)



LOS F

Source: Neighborhoods.org

Which is better?

Background: Benefits of VMT as a Measure of Transportation Impact

- Streamline CEQA Analysis
 - TOD
 - Infill
 - Multimodal projects
 - Locally-serving retail
- Reduce regional congestion more effectively
- Reduce future pavement maintenance deficits
- Improve public health
- **Reduce GHG and other emissions**

(Courtesy of Governor's Office of Planning and Research)



Pertinent Plans and Policies

1. Los Altos Climate Action Plan (2013)

- GHG Emissions Target: 15% below 2005 levels by 2020
- VMT Target: 8% below 2005 levels by 2020*
 - *excluding VMT reduction for alternative fuel vehicles*

2. California Air Resources Board – SB 375 (2018)

- GHG Emissions Target for MTC/ABAG: 19% below 2005 by 2035

VMT Policy Framework: Screening Criteria

Location Based Criteria:

- Sites within ½ mile of existing major transit stop or existing stop along high-quality transit corridor presumed to cause *less than significant* transportation impact
- Sites located within an area where the VMT is less than or equal to the CEQA VMT threshold for the proposed land uses (based on VMT Heat Maps by Parcel developed using the VTA Travel Demand Forecast Model)

VMT Policy Framework: Screening Criteria

Per OPR's technical advisory, **small infill projects*** can be assumed to cause a *less-than-significant* transportation impact.

*Projects generating fewer than 110 daily trips

These projects would be “screened out” (i.e. no VMT analysis):

- Residential: 10 single family dwelling units or 20 multifamily dwelling units
- Office: 10,000 square feet gross floor area
- Industrial: 20,000 square feet gross floor area
- Nursing Home: 40 beds

VMT Policy Framework: Screening Criteria

Per OPR's technical advisory, local-serving retail projects can be assumed to cause a *less-than-significant* transportation impact.

Recommend retail projects up to 50,000 square feet be “screened out” and not require a VMT analysis

Example Retail Developments in Los Altos

Use (Location)	Approximate Gross Floor Area	Retail Type
Rancho Shopping Center (Foothill Expwy)	74,000 s.f.	Regional
Whole Foods (El Camino Real)	51,000 s.f.	Regional
Lucky Supermarket (Grant Rd)	45,000 s.f.	Local-Serving
Walgreens (2nd St)	15,000 s.f.	Local-Serving

VMT Policy Framework: Screening Criteria

Local-serving public facilities* can be assumed to cause a *less-than-significant* transportation impact as they produce very low VMT or replace trips to existing facilities without increasing trips outside of the area.

Example publicly owned or controlled projects that would be “screened out” (i.e. no VMT analysis):

- Branch Library
- Community or Senior Center
- Fire Station
- Public Elementary School

*Screening criterion would not apply to private schools or high schools

VMT Policy Framework: Analysis Methodology

- VMT Metric:
 - Home-based trip VMT per capita for residential land uses
 - Home-based work trip VMT per employee for employment uses
- Calculate Project VMT using:
 - VTA VMT Evaluation Tool – online tool used for most projects
 - VTA Travel Demand Forecast Model – very large projects, unusual land uses, and projects that shift travel patterns

VMT Policy Framework: Analysis Methodology

VTA VMT Evaluation Tool calculates Project VMT based on:

- Project Description
- Location
- Attributes (e.g. Multimodal network improvements, parking, TDM Measures)

VMT Policy Framework: Significance Thresholds

Area	Residential VMT	Population	Residential VMT per Capita	Employment VMT	Jobs	Employment VMT per Job
9-County Region	104,671,663	7,501,728	13.95	57,692,944	3,762,965	15.33
Santa Clara County	24,738,650	1,856,250	13.33	17,318,960	1,040,507	16.64
Los Altos	391,551	32,038	12.22	310,669	16,291	19.07
City / County Average			-8%			+15%

Source: VTA Final Model Forecasts for Year 2015 based on ABAG Projections 2017

Los Altos Residential VMT < Countywide average

Los Altos Employment VMT > Countywide average

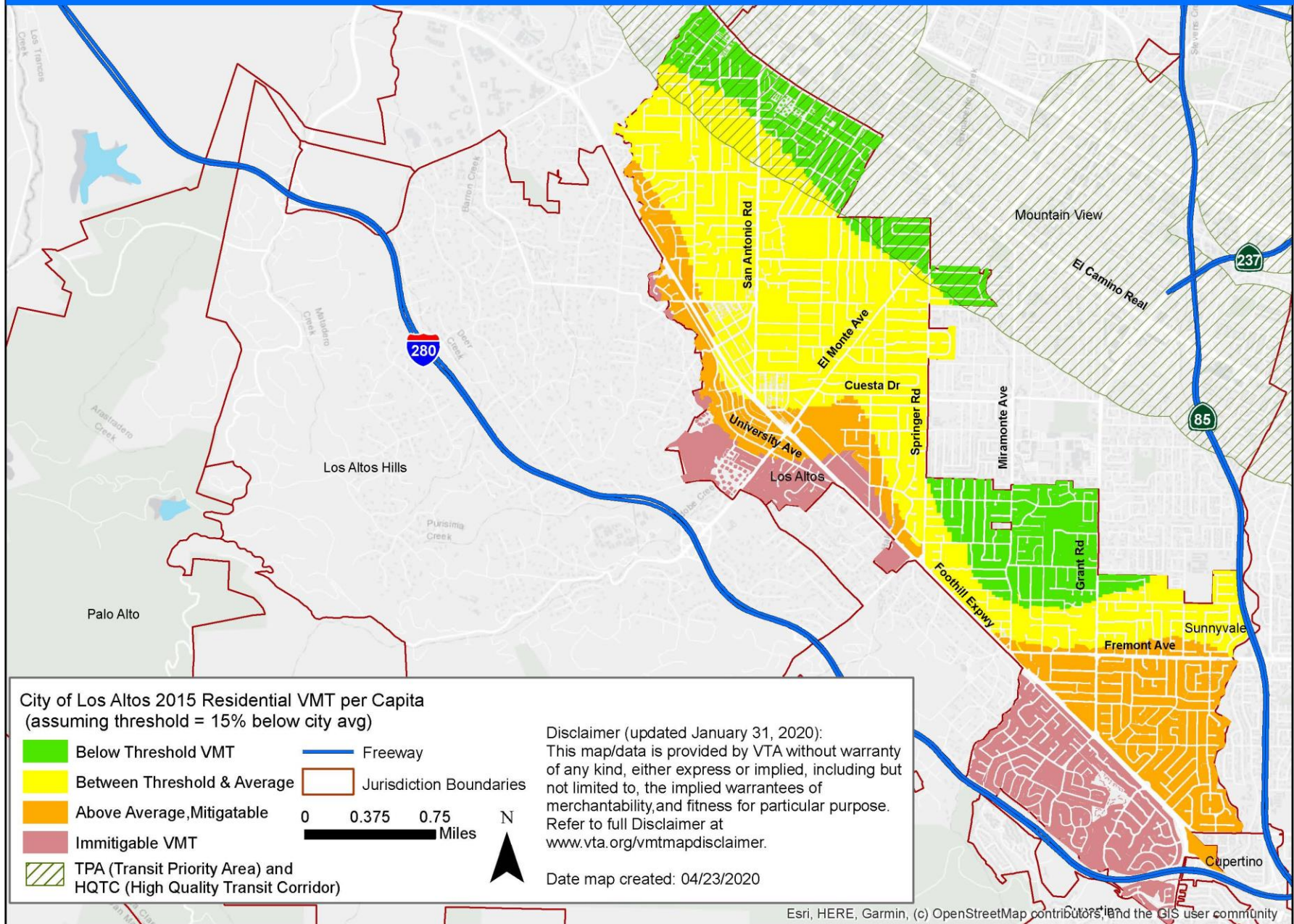
VMT Policy Framework: Significance Thresholds

Recommended Significance Criteria:

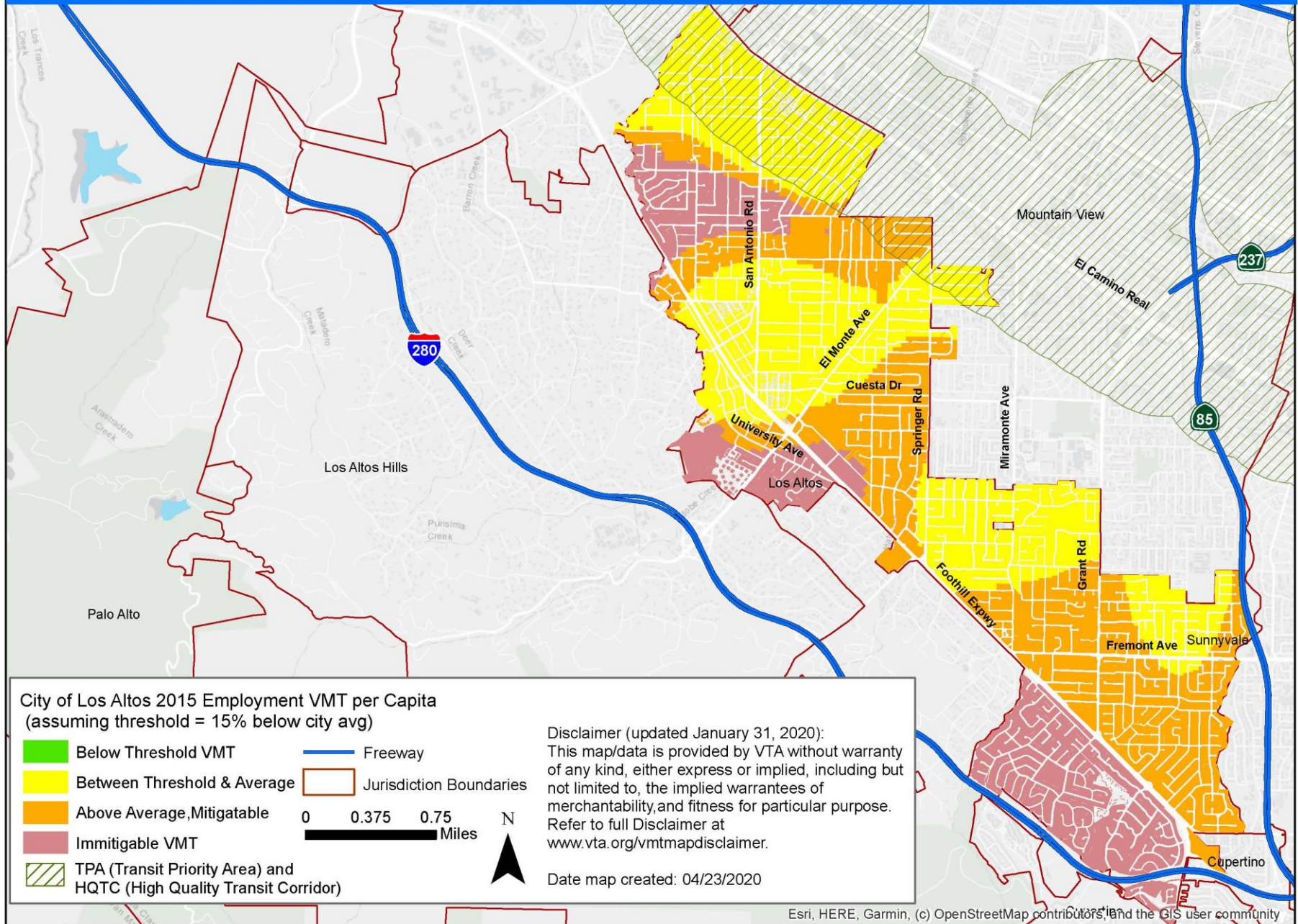
- **Residential** – Project VMT per capita exceeds existing Citywide average VMT per capita minus 15 percent
 - Current Level: 12.22 VMT per capita (Citywide average)
 - Threshold: 10.39 VMT per capita
- **Office & Retail*** – Project VMT per employee exceeds existing Citywide VMT per employee minus 15 percent
 - Current Level: 19.07 VMT per employee (Citywide average)
 - Threshold: 16.21 VMT per capita

**Note: VMT analysis for retail projects applies to employee trips not customer trips*

2015 Baseline VMT Residential by City Average (Draft)



2015 Baseline VMT Employment by Citywide Average (Draft)



VMT Screening Criteria & Methodology: Other Land Uses

Treat the following uses as **office** for screening & analysis:

- Private schools (all grades)
- Public & private high schools
- Congregate care/assisted living
- Medical/dental office
- Research and development
- Industrial/manufacturing/warehouse

Treat the following uses as **retail** for screening & analysis:

- Childcare
- Religious institutions
- Business hotels
- Athletic/Fitness clubs

VMT Analysis Methodology: Mixed-Use Projects

- Evaluate each land use component separately as described above
- Reduce VMT to account for internal trips
- Evaluate impacts based on significance criteria for each land use as described above

VMT Policy Framework: Mitigation Measures

- Reduce single-occupant vehicle trips
- Implement multimodal transportation network improvements (e.g. a new trail connection) – must reduce existing VMT by an amount equal to the project's VMT reduction goal

Los Altos LOS Policy

- LOS will no longer be used to evaluate transportation impacts under CEQA
- Los Altos may retain existing LOS policy in GP and require improvements to local transportation facilities to address LOS deficiencies
- Recommend City continue to require non-CEQA transportation analysis for projects that exceed the VMT screening criteria

Questions for City Council

1. Should projects that would generate fewer than 110 daily trips be screened out?
2. Should the definition of local-serving retail be less than 50,000 square feet?
3. Should the impact threshold be 15% below the current citywide average VMT per resident and per employee?
4. Should a LOS policy be maintained?